

*February 10, 2011*

Mr. Speaker, there are 435 Members of the House of Representatives. We come from all over the country, and every one of us encounters people from the towns and cities and rural parts of our district that inspire us through the heroic action that they exhibit every day of their lives.

Mr. Speaker, I rise this morning to talk about one of those heroic people that I've known for 35 years. Her name is Bev Rens, and I met her when I was working with her husband at a grain elevator in the small town of Hartwick, Iowa. I later got to know her better playing softball for a team called the Front Street Tap located in Brooklyn, Iowa, and Bev's voice was always the loudest voice on the field because that's the kind of person that she is. She is passionate, she is fierce in her dedication to her friends, and she has devoted her entire life to making her community, her State, and her country a better place for all Americans.

Bev recently had a curveball thrown at her when she was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, also known as ALS--Lou Gehrig's Disease. Bev has always taken life head-on, and that's how she addressed this challenge, the same way she has lived her life every day that she has spent on this Earth. She didn't get into self-pity. She started thinking about what she could do to stay connected to her friends, her family, and the important issues that she has cared about all of her life.

Those of us who have known Bev have known her as a nurse, as a community volunteer, and a political activist. And, in fact, her start in politics began in 1988 in the Iowa caucuses when she went to caucus for a candidate named Jesse Jackson. And she participated in her last Iowa caucus for another political candidate named Barack Obama. Bev recently celebrated her birthday on February 3, and you can see her surrounded in this picture by friends and family, including a granddaughter that is the light of her life.

But one of the things that Bev's life teaches us is that we face challenges every day, and no challenge is too great for us to solve if we come together in a spirit of cooperation and a belief in the common good, that we can solve the problems that we face as a country. And that's why I am here talking about my friend Bev Rens, because she is an inspiration to all of us in terms of what we can do to fight for a better America.

She decided a long time ago that access to health care was an important priority being denied millions of Americans, and she knew that from her work as a front-line care provider taking care of sick people and trying to take care of them in their end of life experiences, which is one of the most precious times that a family gets to spend together. So as a nurse, Bev fought for health care improvement that would improve quality of care to patients and expand access to care so that no American family could say that a loved one died because they didn't have access to the type of care that all Americans deserve.

It's important for those of us who are struggling with this issue of how we provide quality, affordable health care to Americans to think about inspirational people like Bev and what she has done her entire life to help people in need, whether as a community volunteer, as a nurse, as an activist. What is the legacy that we will leave to our children and grandchildren when they look back at this Congress and say, What did you do to help me in my time of need? Because Bev never worries about that question. She says, I'll be the first one in, and I will fight until I don't have any breath in me left to give. That's why you'll still find Bev on her computer every day, networked with friends around the country, talking about issues of vital public importance, trying to be part of the important discussion that Americans have every day about improving the quality of this country.

And predictably, in the wonderful small town where I grew up, Brooklyn, Iowa, Bev's story has inspired many others to pick up the cause, and they formed what has been called Bev's Brigade, an army of loyal volunteers who show up at her house every day to take care of her basic needs after a lifetime of helping others. It's one way we pay it forward in this country, through the example that others have given us, to think every day about what we can do to help each other. And that's why Bev is an example to all of us of what the American spirit is all about.